

South branch library after 1 week

Brian Bethel, Abilene Reporter- News 5:48 p.m. CST November 28, 2016



(Photo: Nellie Doneva/Reporter-News)

Since opening Nov. 19, the new Abilene Public Library location in the Mall of Abilene has been "extremely popular," said Tremain Jackson, manager of the South Branch.

"From then until today Nov. 27, we've had 10,689 visits," he said. "That statistic is comparable to our monthly stats at our Danville location during the Summer Reading Club time for one month."

The South Branch recently moved from its original location at 1401 South Danville, a 5,600-square-foot facility, to a 22,000-square-foot renovated space in the Mall of Abilene.

The new digs have brought in some challenges, he said, mostly staff learning changes in procedures better suited to the facility, Jackson said.

"It's fine-tuning a lot of our duties and whatnot, and getting used to our new clientele," he said, with customer service still the primary goal.

The growth in foot traffic is a genuine phenomenon, Jackson said.

"Not only are we pulling in our own clientele from the Danville location, we're bringing in new people that may not have realized that there was a South Branch library on the south side of Abilene," he said. "We were behind a gas station — and kind of hard to find."

Now, as people walk by and do their shopping, new faces appear all the time, Jackson said.

On the facility's opening day, 3,876 people visited on opening day, larger than the grand opening of the library system's Mockingbird Branch in 2009.

The first day of the holiday shopping season was a busy one for the South Branch, he said, with 989 people visiting the branch that day — something Jackson said was "amazing."

"There was tons of foot traffic, people taking a break from their shopping to check out the library, men coming in to read the paper and magazines while their wives were shopping in JCPenney, and things of that nature," he said.

The new interest has resulted in a literal stack of new registrations.

DVDs remain popular items, but the family-oriented nature of the previous South Branch remains in the popularity of children's materials, he said.

"But we're starting to see people start to check out things from our old collection, plus the Dyess materials," he said, referring to a collection of items integrated from Dyess Air Force Base's now-closed library.

Patrons compliment the new location in several ways, from the interior to colors to additional rooms available for reading and projects, including a popular room for teens.

"Sometimes you show the adults that room and you just can't get them out," he said. "You have to remind them that this is just a tour — it's the teen room."

The facility's meeting room has been "hugely popular," he said.

"Bookings for that room had already gone out before we even opened," Jackson said.

Jackson said that it's likely traffic will level some in January or February, after the holidays.

But he hopes that the facility remains vital far into the future, something likely driven by programs both old and new.

All programs from the previous location will be available at the new branch, with additions such as a Lego club and a teen Lego club, a Minecraft Club, a "morning mingle" club for adults on the first and second Wednesday morning of each month.

An already in-demand photo workshop will join anticipated extra programs for adults and teens, including book clubs, he said.

"In our old location we did about 15 programs a month," he said. "At the Mall location for February, we're doing 50. And that's going to be about 50 programs a month (from then on)."

R.J. Barnett was enjoying the new facility with his children Monday. The father of four sons, Barnett said that his kids make use of the library's main branch, but that they already enjoy going to an indoor play area in the Mall just outside the library's Mall Entrance.

"So (now) we can make it a two-for-one type thing," he said, noting that his three oldest sons will "definitely make use of the library."

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A baby steps group meets at the new South Branch of the Abilene Public Library Monday, Nov. 28, 2016. (Photo: Nellie Doneva/Reporter-News)

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